

Howard S. Weitzman
Comptroller

Elizabeth Botwin
Chief Deputy Comptroller

Susan D. Wagner
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September 18, 2006

Supervisor Jon Kaiman
Town of North Hempstead
220 Plandome Road
Manhasset, NY 11030
Sent via Fax: (516) 627-4204

Supervisor Kate Murray
Town of Hempstead
One Washington Street
Hempstead, NY 11550
Sent via Fax: (516) 538-2908

Supervisor John Venditto
Town of Oyster Bay
Town Hall East
54 Audrey Avenue
Oyster Bay, NY 11771
Sent via Fax: (516) 624-6362

Re: Special District Budget Review

Dear Supervisors:

On June 8, you joined me and nearly 400 Nassau County residents in the first-ever Conference on Nassau County Special Districts at Hofstra University. I appreciate your participation that day and your help in organizing the event.

We heard many points of view that morning about Nassau's more than 200 special tax districts, but almost everyone agreed on one thing – there are ample opportunities to reduce wasteful spending in these districts. The tendency to wasteful spending is exacerbated by a widespread lack of governmental oversight of the districts and their budgets.

I write to you now because the special districts are about to bring their 2007 budgets before the Town Boards, which must approve them before they take effect. I understand that the Towns of North Hempstead and Oyster Bay are encouraging special districts to submit their budgets on the same timetable as Town departments, to enable budget analysts to carefully review the spending plans before they are finalized. This is a very encouraging development – just the promise of such a review may impose a greater degree of discipline on district spending plans, to the benefit of our taxpayers.

Considering that special district taxes make up approximately 75 percent of Town taxes paid by residents of unincorporated areas, no Town should simply rubber-stamp these budgets. *All our Towns should exercise their right to review special district budgets before including the amounts in their own budgets.* Moreover, in the public interest, the Towns should publicize the meeting date and time when the Town Board will review these budgets, so that members of the public can raise concerns about special district spending, just as they might about other types of spending.

Working together, I believe we have been effective in shedding more light on special district spending and how it contributes to our property tax burden in Nassau. Now we must take concrete steps to begin to make special district government more cost-effective and responsive to the taxpayers. I believe that the plans announced by North Hempstead and Oyster Bay to increase public scrutiny of special district budgets are a laudable and essential step to increase the districts' accountability. I strongly encourage all the Town Boards to publicly review the special district budgets before voting to include them in the Town budgets.

Sincerely,

Howard S. Weitzman
Nassau County Comptroller

HSW : GMcG